Dear Joan, 8/8/79

Your letter of the 6th came just af ter I'd dragged a load of winter's firewood up from what Lil calls the downhill back 40. This is one of the two stickiest days of the year with the forecast for the hottest. In combination this means what I have come to exult in, a great sweat. I've changed shirts as often as seven times a day recently, three times by 9:30 today. For a time this business of acting like an overloaded coolies in an overdone movie scene tires me a little so with the sweat to works its way out and the minor fatigue I just sit and sweat and think.

With your letter the only thing in the mail requiring any interest I thought more because as I read it walking back up the lane I got a combination of vibes about which I'm not certain with regard to a reading but am certain about their presence.

So I begin by partial response to your asking how I'm making out and feeling - I haven't come to the boasting yet - and with a prelude to what I do not intend to be avuncular or at least that only.

In a sense I am boasting when I report that at my age and with perceptible added problems from the arterial blockage(s) I can and I do engage in these physical exertions with the temperature near and above 90. I do feel good about what I've been able to do outside, about getting ready for winter and the energy crisis and its costs, and when my neighbors tell me that I'm beginning to get the once overgrown woods looking like a state park. There are annoyances in this. I must change and wear too much clothing and spray myself with insect repellents (chiggers are frightful under the tow-to-toe supports I must wear and I'm not supposed to scratch), use heavier and higher shoes and then change out of this armor when I end a bout of this kind of work. It is a big of a drag, but then when I'm wearing little and can cool and I sit back and luxuriate in a powerful soaking sweat and I think there! I did it! and I'll do it again soon! and I remember that this time two years ago I couldn't walk the length of the lane and back without dizziness and fatigue, it is all so wonderful.

This is intended as encouragement for you in your crisis, which you didn't explain but appears to be clear, for emotional earthquakes like those over rock faults have aftershocks. Be prepared and be confident that they, too, will pass and you will be the same or even better for it, I'm inclined to be,ieve the latter.

There have been more than enough crises of too many kinds in my life and I've survived them and to a large degree subliminally learned much from them. We learn and improve from them if we do not duck them and do cope with them, as most of us can and you certainly can.

You are fortunate in having an engrossing project that is other than a means of forgetting. a worthwhile thing that will keep you busy.

I am a little concerned about two of the things you say about this and if it is avuncular, please understand the motive.

In 100 hours you must have gathered very much. Then you say of this "so if I don't have sound judgement about the case now it's no one's fault but my own." This does not necessarily follow and itx should not be what it can be taken to say, that you are uneasy about what you are doing.

I deal with and have been dealing with enormous materials, made enormous as a means of obfuscation. I have also had experience with pathological liars, accomplished ones I've interviewed at length yet people who had important information some of which I was able to perceive through the vastness of the lies.

In such cases, as with all complicated investigations that are not almost transparently clear as well as those that are quite difficult and unclear or uncertain or with clues leading in opposite directions, I have found that the best course is to sieze upon a single clue or fact, if not a certainty then what appears to be reasonable and central, and bulldog it to death. If that doesn't work try another.

In what little I know of your case there are two contractory ones: Michaelides' apparent openness and the local prosecutor's belief that he is the murderer. There may be one of which I did not know, Ms. Bruce's "semi-criminal activities."

In any event you have a real and a worthwhile challenge and you could not have it at a better time! It will be on your mind while you work on the novel.

I have been deposing FBI agents in the King FOIA case, another tomorrow. They are in their vacation period so they are spread out and there is no real schedule. Aside from them I have nothing to take me away for a while. The lecture bureau is not active with me, preferring to book entertainment or the nuts who predominate in the fields in which I work. I have only one program for the coming semester so far, in November. So almost any time you are around here will be fine and we look forward to it and to hearing more of your trip to Greece and its yield.

Naturally I'm pleased to have been in your thoughts and do appreciate it. I'm also pleased to tell you that so far as I know the conditions are more or less stable. Apparently there was some deterioration at the time I hemorrhaged, which was before you were here, and was off the anti-coagulent for a while. I'm a little more weary when I awaken, but that passes off with activity that pumps the blood around. I am a little less vigorous, so I try to and usually do get a little more rest. This is not oppressive and in general I feel fine. The doctor sees my blood tests every week and has had no occasion to want to see me since he got the specialist's consultation report about three months ago.

Your letter is a kind one and I appreciate it and your concerns. Thanks.

I'll close with another coping story whose purposes I believe will be obvious.

Since the recent setback I've been getting dizzy sometimes when I bend over. My next neighbor is a bit older and has angina. But he is a man used to a vigorous life and convinced that the body's health requires the body's activities. He is about 70, is a retired machinist of conservative manner and belief and a widower. He does not want me to do what I shouldn't do, so he wants to use my chain saw for me. Last week there were some already felled trees to be trimmed out and sawed up, so he told me'd do that. He handled the saw like a skilled surgeon does a scalpel. I'd already trimmed off the branches that did not require a saw, so we worked mostly on long longs. One was about 50-60 feet long, full of sap and so straight it rested on the ground at all points. This means we had to raise it so the saw would not go into the earth and be dulled or ruined. There was enough wood in that log to require at least 6-8 trips with a cart to get it near the house after it was out to length for the fire. But I was able to lift the smaller end, about 10" in diameter, for him to slip a block under the log so we could saw safely - time after time. Each time the blood left my head and I held onto a tree when I straightened up. There were no consequences and I expected none. Us two grey panthers got the job and others like it done. This morning he told me that we'll get back to my winter's wood supply next week, after he returns from a short trip. And with the new high-effeciency fireplace stove I've bought I fully expect to get through the winter without buying much if any fuel oil....My neighbor copes with his angina by stretching the vessels and when necessary poping a nitro, which works like magic for him. I cope with my circulatory problems by trying to make all the parts of the body work and by stretching some vessels, which are also hardening, and by actually forcing smaller, ancillary vessels to enlarge. Visibly. For me varicosity has become beautiful. One never knows what will become beautiful. Anything can.

Please excuse the typos, which most people can make out, for I must get back to preparations for the morning's depositions.

Best wishes and the best of good luck-

25 Elm Ridge Road
Pennington, NJ 08534

August 6, 1979

Dear Harold,

How incredibly kind of you to send me the Bruce clipping which I had not seen. I'm immensely grateful. I returned from Europe yesterday to find it, having been first to Athens to interview Marios Michaelides, the indicted murderer of Miss Bruce, then to London to investigate some of her own semi-criminal activities there. I have much to tell you and eagerly await our next meeting. Right now I have to sift through all the information I've gathered; in Greece we spent 10 hours a day together for 10 days, so if I don't have sound judgment about the case now it's no one's fault but my own.

I've also gone through a big personal crisis at this moment, having changed my entire life. Suffice it to say that I am now totally on my own, living alone and this was a big change. I felt trepidations arriving from the airport yesterday to begin this part of my new life. Well, this morning it's 6 a. m. and I'm singing, and organizing materials, and paying impossible bills that I've gotten stuck with. But it's o.k. I have this project which is enormously exciting, as you know.

I plan to come to Washington again, but not before I finish (still) the blasted changes on the novel, finally. This should fill in August, then I'll begin again.

Now: how are you feeling? You've been much in my thoughts and I have been worried about you. Is the condition stable? I very much hope so because you, besides being so dear, are a valuable force we very much need.

Love,

Joan